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Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 180 (2015) 1161 – 1169

Procedia
Social and Behavioral Sciences

The 6th International Conference Edu World 2014 “Education Facing Contemporary World Issues”, 7th - 9th November 2014

European Trends for Adults Education in Lifelong Learning Strategy: Modern Methods and Romanian Skills in Training Management

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Abstract

When speaking about changes regarding Romanian adult lifelong learning system we must point that 1990 is a reference year for adapting to modern skills. The paper below wants to point that adults must be problem-centered in further orientation of educational system in Romania in order to become part of the economic and social development and main actor of this transformation.

The need for permanent adult and vocational education has been a target for all the institutions involved in the attainment of this aim, as the concept of permanent education based upon changing entire societies consists in providing adaptation to all who are part of the active work force within a constantly changing market.

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Peer-review under responsibility of The Association “Education for tomorrow” / [Asociatia “Educatie pentru maine”].

Keywords: adult education; vocational education; lifelong learning; training methods.

1. Considerations and legal frame regarding adult education and vocational training

In the last 30 years, the European Union decision makers considered adult education as being essential to competitiveness and employability, active citizenship and individual development all over Europe and paid special

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attention to the adult, active population. The recommendation 93/404/EEC was adopted by the Council of Europe in Strasbourg in 1996 (and ratified by Romanian Law No. 74/1999) establishing the European Community - TEC, title X, entitled “Education, training and youth” and art. 150 (2) of the TEC (2005, 2006). It states that “*European Community must be interested and matters of professional concern for adaptation in particular through mutations training and vocational retraining; improvement of the initial professional formation and permanent formation to facilitate the professional insertion on the labor market; on the other hand it points to facilitate access to vocational training and encouraging trainers and persons in training, particularly young people, boosting cooperation in the establishment of educational institutions or between vocational training and enterprises, developing the exchange of information and experience about training systems of the Member States in administration institutions too*” (Sava, 2008: 30). This Recommendation 93/404/EEC regarding professional training says that any worker should have access to vocational training, without discrimination, during its active life (Recommendation 93/404/EEC, 1996, adopted in Romania in 1999). The revised European Social Charter stipulates in article no. 10, “Right of access to education as the signatory parties to consider the following skills”:

- to provide special measures for the retraining and reintegration of the unemployed it long lasting;
- to provide or promote, depending on requirements, technical and professional training of all persons, including persons with disabilities, in consultation with professional organizations of workers and employers, and to provide access to higher education in universities;
- to ensure or to promote depending on requirements, the corresponding measures and easily accessible to employers and workers needed as a result of technical evolution or a new market orientation;
- to provide or promote a system of apprenticeship and other training arrangements for young people.

We must speak about the *Recommendation 93/404/EEC* as being the first important step taken by European Institutions to develop a specific legislation in order to support structural changes in permanent education and training field followed by „*Memorandum on the Lifelong Learning*” of the European Commission, adopted in October 2000 (Țiclea, 2000: 255). This document invited member states to identify coherent strategies and practical measures for the development of lifelong learning/training: “...*all people should have equal possibilities to adapt to the requirements of the socio economic changes*”. It should be mentioned that afterwards it was the *Declaration of the European Ministers of Education and Vocational Training* in front of the European Commission, stated in Copenhagen in 2002 which established the priorities on strengthening European cooperation in vocational training and adult education (the term “adult education” is of quite recent date, since 1919, launched in the United Kingdom at the “Committee on adult education”). The Council Resolution on renewed European agenda for adult learning, 2011/C372/01, is “*The Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth acknowledges lifelong learning and skills development as key elements in response to the current economic crisis, to demographic ageing and to the broader economic and social strategy of the European Union*”. Everyone could see that the crisis and, now, the recession, has highlighted the major role which adult learning can play in achieving the Europe 2020 goals, by enabling adults – in particular the low-skilled and older workers – to improve their ability to adapt to changes in the labor market and society.

Priority areas for the period 2012-2014 (Annex European Agenda for Adult Learning 2011) *take into account the specific circumstances within each Member State, and in accordance with national priorities, Member States are invited, where appropriate with the support of the Commission, to focus on those areas outlined below which are most relevant to their particular needs. Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality: in order to increase and widen the participation of adults in lifelong learning, in response to the agreed EU target of 15 % adult-learning participation, as well as to help boost to 40 % the proportion of young adults with tertiary and equivalent education qualifications, Member States are invited to focus on:*

- *Promoting the engagement of employers in workplace-based learning, with a view to developing both job-specific skills and broader skills, including by means of more flexible work schedules;*
- *Stimulating demand, and developing comprehensive and easily accessible information and guidance systems, complemented by effective outreach strategies aimed at raising awareness and motivation among potential learners, with specific focus on disadvantaged groups, early school leavers, young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs), low-qualified adults, particularly those with literacy difficulties, and followed up with second-chance opportunities leading to a recognized EQF level qualification;*

- *Promoting flexible learning pathways for adults, including broader access to higher education for those lacking mainstream access qualifications and diversifying the spectrum of adult learning-opportunities offered by higher education institutions;*
- *Putting in place fully functional systems for validating non-formal and informal learning and promoting their use by adults of all age and at all qualification levels, as well as by enterprises and other organizations.*

The aspects of adult education, permanent training and vocational training have been adapted at the level of Romania by specific legislation respecting the Priority Areas (http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/adult-learning/index_en.htm, 22.08.2014): making lifelong learning and mobility a reality and increasing access to education for all, improving the quality and efficiency of the adult learning system, promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship through participation in social and cultural learning for personal development and fulfillment, enhancing the creativity and innovation of adults and their learning environments, improving and monitoring the knowledge base. A lot of hard work was necessary in order to revise the curriculum to eliminate the ideological orientation of school curricula and textbooks before 1990. During this time, the first drafts of a new Law on Education no.84 were also drawn up in 1995. The reform touched the education system, *its programmes, actors, underlying philosophy, and educational governance, and linked the education system to the market economy, the rule of law, and individual freedom in order to help the economic development of the country* (OECD, 2001). All policy and legal reforms continued until today based by The National Development Plan 2007-2013 (NDP), and the Sectoral Operational Programme for the Development of Human Resources (SOPHRD) starting with 2007, which aim towards attaining the benchmarks set in the Lisbon Agenda for education, training and employment. Some lifelong learning objectives are also explicitly found in sectoral strategic documents, such as: The National Employment Strategy 2004-2010, The Short and Medium Term Strategy of Continuing Vocational Training 2005-2010, The Ministry of Education and Research Strategic Guidelines for 2006-2008, and new **Law of Education no. 1/2011 which contains a special part dedicated to 'permanent education'**.

The main responsibility for organizing and accreditation of adult education belongs to some institutions: the Ministry of Labor, Social Solidarity and Family, the Ministry of National Education (previously the Ministry of Education, Research and Youth), the Minister of Culture and Cults and National School of Political and Administrative Studies (S.N.S.P.A.) an institution born from the fusion Romanian Institute of Management in the Ministry of Labor and Social protection and Training Centre of Local Public Administration (until the year 1989, in the case of Romania training of the staff centralized management board has been made by the state institution, a center of courses in Bucharest, named "Ștefan Gheorghiu" Academy), respecting the demands and the type of the programme provided. Regarding adult education activities it is necessary to respect and ensure two main objectives:

- *training must point out those factors that act on the ethical, cultural and social aspects.*
- *trainings must be directly related to the aspects of the individual's qualifications*

These are the main goals of adult educational and lifelong learning strategy as *"Lifelong learning has undergone a great number of interpretations during the years, but several key characteristics were stressed out. The lifelong dimension of the learning process is a characteristic that defines learning in the knowledge economy. The traditional approach of studying for a definite period of time to complete education before moving to the labor market is increasingly replaced by the continuous learning throughout the entire lifecycle of the individual. This represents a requirement of the knowledge economy, since knowledge is developing at faster pace, becoming easily obsolete and requiring individuals to continuously update and upgrade their knowledge, skills and competences"* (Popescu, 2013).

Speaking about high standards of professional educational system, they must be planned, organized, well based, since modelling the human factor is an important issue discerning which need to work a staff with various specialties (Sava, 2008: 33). Based on our trainer practice, we can say that at that time, things worked quite difficultly in the sense that public institutions and local public administration authorities were not very clear concerning the purposes of financial allocation resources for adult training (even for the staffs) and, so far, legislation had not specifications regarding the duration of the training sessions and the definition of "short term" and "long term" training was not mapped. At the same time, training providers have competence for (Dimitrescu, Pangica, 2013):

- partnerships for organizing courses of specialization and training with higher education institutions in the country, accredited for this purpose;
- applying new training methods in order to increase creativity and performance;
- using new methods to motivate and to get better results by sharing experience (as brainstorming, teambuilding, benchmarking, coaching and mentoring, etc.);
- elaborating strategies and providing training for professional training for personnel employed by individual contract of work within the authorities and public institutions;
- partnerships with institutions for organizing courses of specialization with similar institutions from abroad and elaborating strategies and providing training for people named or elected in a public office or functions similar to those of central and local public administration, as well as to other interested parties;
- drafting projects and publications, developing collaborative relationships with other institutions being authorized to certify and to grant certificates of compliance with international quality pointing on evaluation in order to identify the possibility of minimum conditions regarding experience and specialty studies necessary in the recruitment process.

2. Needs and requirements in Romanian adult education and training system using modern methods

In the Romanian training system we must admit that many important changes were made. Scholars pointed that Romanian adult education and training system reform should be connected with the experience of other countries (the U.S. merit system, the British civil service, the German administration or the French public service, based on tradition, stability in their jobs, recruitment system based on competition) and pay a permanent attention for a constant professional training using the most advanced methods. A modern and efficient adult training system brings, undoubtedly, an added value on a human resource quality, a professional staff body in institutions and companies, able to raise the performance level and satisfy citizens' interests and needs (Dimitrescu, Pangica, 2013). Speaking about modern and professional adult training, we must use well-known modern methods which had been used to improve organizational and individual performance, creative abilities and motivate staff. Here it is a briefly synthetic presentation of the most used kinds of modern training instruments:

Table 1: Modern training methods – general presentation

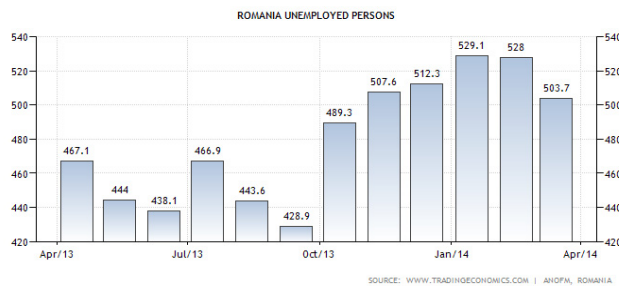
Method	Definition	Activities	Main characteristic
Team Building	<p>- it is a session point to that activities used in an indirect way in order to motivate the organization or company members and to increase the overall performance of the team.</p> <p>- a motivational method, an internal game inside the organization, a play role including the staff (Dimitrescu, Pangica, 2013)</p>	<p>1. Forming: it is the initial orientation period. The team is unsure about what they are supposed to do, members do not know each other well or are not yet familiar. This stage is complete when the members begin to see themselves as a part of the group;</p> <p>2. Storming: it is a sorting out period, members begin to find their place as team members; now they feel more comfortable giving their opinion and challenging the team leader's authority and recommendations;</p> <p>3. Norming: Team members begin to use their past experiences to solve</p>	<p>This model has its starting point from the idea saying that „a team is a living and dynamic entity. It could progress from an early to a mature phase, independent of the nature of the team or the task it must perform”. Tuckman's model proposed the following typical phases in team development (www.businessballs.com).</p> <p>During the sessions, the trainer must point to enlarge trust among the members of the staff, play exercises in order to help the team members know each other well, or drafting play games provoking individuals to work together as a single unit, or to act for a common task. It is known as <i>Tuckman's forming storming</i></p>

		<p>their problems. This process should result in the team establishing procedures for handling conflicts, decisions, and methods to accomplish the team projects;</p> <p>4. Performing: the team has achieved harmony, defined its tasks, worked out its relationships, and has started producing results and leadership is provided by the team members; team has learned how to work together, manage conflict and contribute their resources to meet the team's purposes.</p> <p>5. Dissolving: The team dissolves when the group has completed the project. It may be reoriented to continue on a next phase of the project.</p>	<p><i>norming performing four-stage developing model</i> (www.businessballs.com).</p>
Benchmarking (1970')	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - measures performance compared with the best companies, how those companies accomplish the levels of performance and use of your information as a basis for the objectives and strategies of companies, a permanent structured process that leads to superior performance and a competitive advantage" (Saylor James, 1998); - it is a management method, meant to lead to the growth of the Organization's performance by observing the environment. (Scott, 2004) 	<p>Benchmarking objective is to understand and evaluate an actual position of an organization or company compared to "the best practice in the market" and to find out the areas and means of performance improvement, following the four important steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understand all details of the activity/business in processes. - Analyze the similar activity/business processes in other institutions/companies - Compare the level of performance studying data obtained on the level 1 and 2 -Develop a plan and implement it, following the steps necessary to get the performance (Dimitrescu, Pangica, 2013). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Benchmarking goes to performance or to a functional goal that enables organization achieve an excellent level of quality, performance, cost and speed. It is necessary that the processes or service can be measured compared to a process, product or service to be recognized as being the best in the world. - Benchmarking should not be considered a one-off exercise. To be effective, it must become an ongoing, integral part of an ongoing improvement process with the goal of keeping abreast of ever-improving best practice (Maniu, 2013).
Coaching (Renton, 2009: 8-27)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - coaching is a powerful instrument that can help you to make changes in your business or career, improve performance, enhance relationships with others or develop specific skills. - coaching is unlocking a 	<p>Discover, clarify, and align with what individual/group wants to achieve; (Grief, 2007)</p> <p>Elicit person/group generated solutions and strategies;</p> <p>Hold them responsible and</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - coaching (Passmore, 2010) points to what is to do in the future - finding the best solutions - focus on strengthening the clients' goals just from the first session business/corporate

	person's potential to maximize their own performance. It helps them learn rather than teach them ²	accountable. Encourage self-discovery;	Coaching principles: 1. Clear understanding of the problem; 2. Performance willing; 3. Develop a relaxed partnership between coach and client; 4. Make individuals understand the skills to performance/success (Grief, 2007).
Brainstorming	<p>- brainstorming is a collective training method which makes the participants come up with new ideas and makes the generation of new ideas easy; it is a tried-and-tested process.</p> <p>- brainstorming techniques help to develop new products, services and processes in your job, or you can apply them to develop your personal life (Ferris, Hedgcock, 2005).</p>	<p>In a brainstorming session there are not specific rules, so the team could act without inhibitions (European training school has adopted brainstorming quite recently at the level of more and more institutions due to its practical and fast application and it is considered a very attractive exercise for performance); individuals speak and act freely in new tasks, could find out new solutions, alternatives and ideas. There is a person just notating the new solutions and ideas and not criticized or adding alternatives. At the end of the brainstorming session there is a presentation of all new solutions which are evaluated; after the evaluation, the best idea/solution or the most voted one is chosen and brainstorming is done (Dimitrescu, Pangica, 2013).</p>	<p>The four basic rules in brainstorming (Ferris, Hedgcock, 2005):</p> <p>No criticism: Criticism of ideas is permitted as the purpose is on generating varied and unusual ideas and extending or adding other elements;.</p> <p>Welcome unusual ideas are welcomed as it is normally easier to "tame down" than to "tame up" as new ways of thinking and looking at the world may provide better solutions.</p> <p>Quantity Wanted: The higher the number of ideas generated is, the higher the chance of giving a radical and effective solution is.</p> <p>Combine and improve ideas: several ways to combine ideas are accepted in order to make them better.</p>

All the adult methods presented above are used in order to increase adult educational level, performance and quality of employed and unemployed adults. At the level of universities studies institutions point to specializations in important fields for the labor market, respecting the decentralization principle for school autonomy for defining curriculum and enables them linking with local companies, administration and institutions. Moreover, it is necessary to develop vocational learning in order to diminish the rate of unemployed persons because statistics presents alarming figures as presented below.

Table 2: The rate of unemployed from April 2013 to April 2014



In a presentation made by Ph.D. Andreea Laczick about VET - vocational education and training (2013), about the most up-to-date developments and changes that are going on in Romania she mentioned that: *It was also interesting to see the scale and range of EU funded projects in Romania, their impact on national developments and how European and national priorities coincide or differ. All institutions the state upper secondary vocational school specializes in commerce, tourism and hospitality and catering. It combines enterprise activities with learners' practical training. The school offers services to the local community, such as hostel rooms and catering for special occasions working together with the Ministry of Education of Romania, the National VET Centre, the National Qualifications Authority, the National Agency for Community Programmes for Education and Professional Development and the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance on Pre-University Education. This was a good introduction to the Romanian IVET and CVET systems and recent and proposed policy developments.* For instance, the study shows that participation in vocational training is most common in financial insurance services (54.7% of employees), followed by the production and supply of electric and thermal power, gas, water and air conditioning (41.8%) and the mining industry (23.1%).

The table below gives a full breakdown by sector of vocational training participation (www.eurofound.europa.eu):

Table 3: Characteristics of professional training in Romanian enterprises

Vocational training participation in Romania (% of workers in each sector)			
Sector	Total	Men	Women
Mining industry	23.1	20.3	38.9
Manufacturing industry	19.8	23.2	16.2
Production and supply of electricity, heating, gas, water and air conditioning	41.8	42.0	38.3
Construction	7.2	7.2	7.3
Commerce	14.7	14.1	15.3
Transport and warehousing	20.5	22.9	14.4
Hotels and restaurants	7.5	8.0	7.2
Information and communications	19.5	20.2	18.6
Financial intermediation and insurance	54.7	49.8	56.7
Real estate transactions	11.4	13.0	9.3
Professional, scientific and technical activities	18.5	17.7	19.5
Other services	4.9	5.5	4.3
Participation rates for national labor force	17.8	18	17.6

Source: National Institute of Statistics (2012)

In the end, we must show that adult education, mainly the concept of lifelong learning and vocational training must be the interface between theoreticians and practitioners and must be developed based on platforms for professionals working in adult education using a wide range of channels: publications (Journal, newsletter),

annotated information resources, academic events and the database to be developed (contacts, legislation). Secondly, we must include experienced professionals as resource evaluators, assessors of competences, advisors for policies for adult education and educators, consultants for organizational development, providers of training and development for competences specific for adult education, being affiliated to more and more institutions or working together as partners. They promote and retain institutional knowledge and professionalism to develop some modern society.

3. Conclusions

Regarding those presented in this paper, we should stress that both the training courses and the professional training for adults, as well as the courses in the vocational category, must obey certain requirements imposed by modern and actual pre-selected dating criteria in the Recommendation 93/404/EEC regarding professional EU training. The design of training programs requires linking several categories of variables related to the objectives, content, training methods and teaching and instruments that can be used. All these must be determined by reference to the permanent assessment criteria, which can quantify the success or failure of a training program. Romanian decision makers must understand that legal frames are to be implemented in an efficient way only with professionals, to provide theoretical and methodological support for institutions engaged in adult education, to be connected with the work of academics and practitioners in the field of AE - adult education and VE - vocational educational strategy through participative and applied research and through development projects. Working with professional adult learning providers could be a credible partner in common effort of accelerating reforms and the overall research aim could improve the quality of the education for adults, could identify ways to enhance their ongoing participation in learning, and also to strengthen the lifelong learning dimension both at individual and institutional level, eliminating the effects of the economic crisis and recession.

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